

Interview with Kostas Panagiotou / Pantheist vocalist and keyboardist

Conducted by Stephen Burrell, Pantheist webmaster Saturday 26th March 2011

I have always wanted to interview Pantheist, to really delve deeply into all the topics which this special band makes me wonder about, and the impending release of the band's fourth album provided the perfect excuse. The vast majority of interviews with metal bands these days, outside those of the big magazines, seem to be conducted on the internet through e-mail or other such methods, and they provide little possibility for discourse or a genuine, detailed exploration of different issues. Never mind the formulaic, bland questions often asked in a lot of these interviews of course. It seemed only right then that I should meet up with Kostas, Pantheist singer, keyboardist, founding member and main song writer, and have a face to face discussion the old fashioned way, over a few beers with a dictaphone.

I can't promise that the questions I asked were any better than the kind you normally find in metal zines, or that they did Kostas and this most fascinating of bands any justice. However, Kostas ardently responded to each question with such depth and introspection that it guaranteed that it would make for a truly unique and revealing interview either way. As Pantheist's webmaster, I am friends with Kostas, and the band has been among my very favourites since '1000 Years' more than ten years ago. With this in mind, I was a very biased interviewer. But then, surely every interviewer has an opinion on the band they are interviewing and if they don't, they haven't listened to them, in which case they shouldn't be interviewing them in the first place. So as one Pantheist fan to others, I hope you enjoy reading the interview as much as I enjoyed getting an insight into the mind of Kostas and Pantheist.

Stephen

Stephen: Thank you for agreeing to do this interview Kostas.

Kostas: Ah well, you're welcome.

S: So to start off with, on the same day as this interview will be published, the latest Pantheist album will go on sale. Just to start off with, can we hear a few words about the album, a kind of blurb if you like, from one of the main men behind it.

K: Yeah, I mean, with this album it was very different, the process, from all the other albums we did. Or well, I say we did, but with the earlier albums it was more, I was really 100% the driving force, the other members were just sort of helping me out if you like. Without wanting to minimise them, but actually that was more or less what it was, it was like, referred to as Kostas's band, Pantheist at the time. So it kind of has evolved with time, because I wanted to get more people involved, when you are in a band I want to have a proper band and not sort of, a project, a glorified project, like some supposed bands are, so really that was like the latest step in the evolution, and it was more democratic than anything else actually, the last album.

There are seven compositions on it, four of them composed by myself, the other three by Ilia actually, and the intro was actually Ilia together with our drummer, Sterghios. It was basically open to anyone really, this album. I had many more compositions but when I heard Ilia's stuff I thought, that fits so nicely to some of the ideas that I had, and I said, let's go with what he comes up with. So it's a very personal album really, but then, it's not just one person, it's two people really, it's really myself and Ilia who actually, you know, have composed the tracks. And of course, everyone has incredibly contributed to the compositions, in terms of arrangements. Everyone got really into it, and Sterghios and Mark, and Pepijn of course, all of us, I think we really wanted this to be the best album we've done so far, and I think we have succeeded.

S: So it's very much more a kind of group process with this album than with any album before?

K: Yeah, I mean from the moment you are in a band you always listen to others, but the reality was, quite early on I don't think people really understood what I was trying to do. Without saying they were in the wrong band or something, but sometimes when the ideas you have are a bit esoteric and a bit too personal maybe that people sometimes go, let's just do what he says because we don't really get what he wants to get. And that's the reason also why we had some line-up changes in the beginning. Like Frederic and Oscar left because they just didn't, I mean they liked 'O Solitude' but they couldn't get into 'Amartia', the second album, they just didn't get the compositions. Nicolas did and he stayed in the band.

So we sort of, yeah we lost a lot of members along the way, for various reasons, but I think one of the reasons is because it is such a personal thing, Pantheist. So not everyone could identify in the same way that I did, with the idea, with the concept, with the, you know, motivation that I had to do this. I suppose that if the music was a bit more, not mainstream, that's not the right word, but a bit more accessible from the beginning, people would find it a bit easier to get into. But in the last album it's more accessible than ever in a sense, and therefore it was much easier for everyone to understand what I was doing and contribute in the same way. Hence the process has become much more democratic really.

S: So obviously since, with the release of the album, the line-up has actually changed again from the group of people who were behind the recording of it. I mean because of for example Ilia's heavy involvement in the album, will it be hard therefore to carry on, with the line-up changes now?

K: Yeah I mean, yeah obviously as I said, Ilia contributed seriously to this album. I mean he composed three tracks, and it's quite unusual for anyone in Pantheist to do that, other than myself. And they're very good tracks, they really added a lot to the album, and to the atmosphere of the album. And Mark obviously was in the band since 2004, so he has contributed a lot. And I think on this album it was by far his best performance, he really gave it all, he did some great effects, some great bass lines that added a lot to the arrangements.

Both of them were utterly important, but...I mean the way I see things in Pantheist and the way I work makes it easy for me to redefine the band on each album. Therefore, you know, to be perfectly honest, I could start with a new line-up tomorrow and do something else because I would then focus on what I have rather than on the past. In the beginning I was a bit concerned that, oh I need the sound of Pantheist, or whatever, but not so much anymore because that sound I think comes naturally, whatever I do it sounds like Pantheist. Even, I don't know if you agree but, the fourth album is totally different from the first and yet, people can say immediately, oh this is Pantheist.

S: Yeah, definitely.

K: It has some characteristic stuff that is there, so I'm not that much anymore concerned that I need to make something that sounds like Pantheist, because it sounds like Pantheist anyway, this band with this particular sort of philosophy, the way that we're working. And of course I hope that people stay as long as possible, but if they don't stay, I'll just find other people and, we'll do a different album. Every album we start from scratch. It's nothing to do with, you know, even though we are building further on the past, it's nothing to do with, ah we did this in the past now we should be doing this really, it's more about let's take it as a whole, start it from scratch, maybe you have a concept, an idea, and we start from there and build further on that idea. So, it's easy to take it from-to start from the beginning every time. And therefore the line-up, obviously it will define the sound of the album you're working on. But you know, that's all you need, a line-up, just people who play the instruments, and then you can make any album I think.

S: Has there ever been, have you ever felt a kind of, sense of instability because of the line-up changes? Or has it, have you always been able to kind of deal with it when there have been line-up changes?

K: Well, in terms of a studio output not so much, because it's like as I said, it's just a matter of where you work with what you have and then you sort of...I don't necessarily want to continue on one particular aspect of the past, there are so many different things, in our sound. I mean some bands have like, one trick they sort of repeat on every album, and then you need I think, it's important to have, the formula, someone to keep the formula. We don't really have a formula, just certain characteristics of the actual sound, perhaps a particular timbre of my voice, or the keyboard sound, or the fact that the music is slow that stays as a constant, but not so much a formula.

So in terms of instability, well I think it's more to do obviously with playing live, that's very frustrating. Because of course live, that's where you know, you can really see the effects of instability, because every time your line-up changes you need to find new people who can assimilate, and the new people will never sound like the old. And of course live is not like on record where you just play the latest stuff, people expect to hear the older stuff, and then you play the older stuff but then with musicians who were not there when they were recorded, and therefore the sound differs. So it is a bit frustrating, because sometimes it feels a bit like

starting from scratch live in many ways, which although is good on record to work like that, I think live you need the stability and continuity. We're missing that a bit as a band and I think we have suffered over the years. You know, we've played 45 gigs or something since we started, which sounds alright, but when you think we've existed for 10 years it's actually not that much. And we only started gigging in 2002, but that's still 9 years of gigs, we could have played much more. But we've had very long 'dead' periods, we have one now, the album was recorded in January of course, now for the new line-up to get to know the tracks our next gig is going to be May, so again 4 months where we couldn't really have done anything because people were learning the tracks. So yeah that's the main thing really.

S: Are there other effects that the line-up changes have on the band? I mean, are there any kind of ways you see it as positive that you do have new influences coming in and out? And also are you happy with the current line-up that you now have?

K: Yeah, there is definitely always positive stuff, because of course nobody will ever come into Pantheist unless the rest of us are satisfied that they have something to bring. And what they bring is not necessarily what the previous member did, we always want people to have their own style. I mean, Aleksej for instance now who does the bass. He's a very good bass player, and one thing he has enacted, because that was what we were looking for, one thing that he has in common with Mark is that he's an active bass player. He doesn't sort of, passively play rhythm, but he adds a lot of his own lines. So we wanted someone who does that but we didn't want someone who does exactly what Mark does. And he has a totally different style from Mark, but he has his own style and that was important for us. So from that point of view you know they will always add something to the band.

Yeah I am confident definitely with the latest line-up. I mean we made a very important decision for the first time in the history of the band to play with one guitar rather than two, and that's a big risk, we have to see how it works out, we don't know yet. I am confident it will work out, because of course I am at the rehearsals and I can hear how it sounds, and it sounds great. But inevitably it's going to be different, we'll see a different band, that sounds different, that approaches things differently. If you have one guitar, then it leaves more space for the bass and the keyboards to do all kinds of different stuff.

So inevitably yeah it's going to sound...even if you play the same tracks they're not going to sound exactly the same. But I don't think necessarily you need-I mean I remember the first band when I got into metal was Moonspell, and I had this record of theirs which had just came out, 'Irreligious', and I really liked it. But I went to see them live and all the tracks sounded exactly like on the CD, and actually I was disappointed, I was like, I didn't expect them to sound exactly like on the CD. Obviously some were overdubbed, some others were just played exactly, you know they must have rehearsed them quite...but since then I had this idea of you know, okay the fans don't want you to butcher and to destroy your own tracks by doing electro versions of techno versions or something like that. But I think they appreciate a live sound, a sound that sounds differently than on the record. So you know, I don't think it's

a bad thing to do something differently, as long as you, well as long as people recognise the tracks I guess [laughs].

And the feel of the original...I mean what you try to do is to recapture the sound, of the original track. And recapturing the sound is not necessarily doing the same arrangement but it's more like, you have to listen to it and understand what the spirit if you like is of the track, and make sure that the spirit stays there. I mean, a good song in principle can be played in different ways. You know, as I'm sure you see so many bands out there, even metal bands, who release unplugged albums, but that's because their songs are written in terms of, it's a good song and therefore it can work in different settings. You can play a song with an acoustic guitar, you can play it on the piano, you can play it with a full band. In my view those are the good songs, that you can play in a lot of different arrangements, and yet you can hear that this is our song and you can get the same feel from it. Otherwise it means you are relying too much on the actual, you know, the equipment that you have if you like. Like Sunn O))) for instance, I mean take away the distortion and what stays, what stays behind, not very much. It's like the distortion is what makes the music, so yeah; we have a different approach than that.

S: So therefore maybe difference isn't necessarily at all a bad thing, as long as it's kind of, carried across well, then it can, yeah it's always appreciated I guess.

K: Yeah I mean, for us as a band, I think it was in our DNA to change. I think a misunderstanding happened there in the early days, between '1000 Years' and 'O Solitude' perhaps, the demo and the first album, because they were very similar. Well, they were different at the same time, but they had a very similar atmosphere, and people thought that we were that kind of band, that we will sort of evolve, doing very similar things. That we were going to release an 'O Solitude' number 2, and then an 'O Solitude' number 3, and then '1000 Years' number 2 etcetera. But we never did that, because that was never the idea. But of course a demo's a very imperfect thing, you release it, you record it with a very limited budget in home studios. So what you want to do is then record an album that has perhaps a lot of the songs that were on the demo, but then properly recorded, and that was what 'O Solitude' was in many ways. But of course, there was also enough time in between to add some extra stuff, like we had some blast beats, some more ambient stuff, so there was already the change there, we were already progressing onto something.

But then 'Amartia' was totally different, there was a much more sort of oriental, byzantine feel behind it. So with each album really we just sort of, take it forward always, and not behind. So yeah change, for me, in this band, is essential really. I get bored by doing the same thing twice. I think also, it would be easier to do the same thing if it was a genre where other bands were not doing it, if you see what I mean. But since, especially in doom, I feel there's not much change anyway, you feel automatically pushed, like ah I want to do something different. If I was playing like Crippled Black Phoenix who are playing more experimental music, where all the other bands in the genre were doing also the same, trying to be different and experimental, I would maybe have a tendency to be more conservative, and say, alright,

let's find a formula and play proper tunes or something. But now, you know, in doom, because that's a formulaic genre, I really want to break the formula. You have plenty of bands that follow the formula, so I don't want to follow it, I want to do something different. And I think most people in this band, well especially now with the line-up, and definitely the previous line-up before it changed, were thinking exactly the same. We were not interested in giving people what they want. It is sometimes better to tease people a bit, with something that makes them think "aggh" and in the beginning they think, that's not really what I want, but then hopefully, we hope that people listen to it and then think, well actually, although it wasn't what I expected I really like it, and actually I like it even more than if you had played something that was exactly what I wanted.

Because, at the end of the day, part of the thrill of listening to music I think is doing stuff that is not necessarily the same every time, and listening to that sort of stuff as well. I mean when I listen to music, each album has its own atmosphere, that's how I approach things with Pantheist. So if I hear a great album from a great band, I'll just think of something... 'Epicus Doomicus Metallicus' by Candlemass, or 'Turn Loose the Swans' by My Dying Bride. I don't expect the next album to be like 'Epicus Doomicus' number 2 or 'Turn Loose' number 2, they captured that particular vibe there and that's great, I'm very grateful, but I don't expect them to capture exactly the same vibe next time, because they can't. The better the album is the more difficult it is to capture it I think, so you have to move on, naturally you have to do something different.

S: And that's a good example I guess, because with My Dying Bride for example, perhaps their most popular and successful albums were the earlier ones where they did make real changes, and now the more recent albums, which are perhaps much more similar in many ways, have not been as popular, certainly among some sections of people.

K: Yeah I mean it's a bit of a special case with My Dying Bride, I think they just got a bit scared when they did the '34.788%' album, which in the beginning I was just like all the other fanboys, I was like, ohh betrayal, what is this? It's not real My Dying Bride! I even wrote a terrible review at Doom-metal.com about it. But actually after many years I listened to it and thought, well actually it's not as bad as I thought, as I had it in my mind. And then I started liking it actually, and in the meanwhile, after that of course, because everyone was totally outraged, My Dying Bride went back to the formula, repeating the same formula again, and now I don't like them anymore.

They lost, you know, the spirit of adventure that they had on the earlier albums. In the earlier albums, some of them I liked, some others I didn't, but I always respected them for doing whatever they wanted. And now, it sounds like they do what their audience wants, which for me is not really what, well at least not in underground music-not even underground, anything but mainstream music, I think should be about bands doing what, artistically, really what develops their potential I guess, that's what it is about. And I think My Dying Bride had the potential to do something unique for much longer than they did, but somehow they got too...satisfied with the particular formula they had found, and the fact that the fans were all

applause applause, and reacted to it so positively, that out of fear of getting the same reaction as '34.788%' they decided to keep repeating the same formula.

S: Yeah...and do you think there could ever be a Pantheist 'unplugged' album?

K: Um...well, there could be, there could be now! If someone was to say, well we want you to do an unplugged album, I would think about it, because I would see it as a challenge. I would think, it would be quite interesting to take some of the tracks, and see whether they work actually. Because if my theory is right, that the good tracks can be transferred to different settings, played with different arrangements, then I would hope we can do the same with some Pantheist tracks. Actually, it's funny you say that, even when we were recording the first album 'O Solitude', I remember sitting there with everyone; myself, Nicolas, Oscar and Frederic. Nicolas had taken his acoustic guitar, I was just singing, Frederic had a, you know, a flute, a small, how do you call these small sort of flutes that you play at school...

S: Like a recorder or something?

K: A recorder yeah that's it! Yeah and Oscar was, I don't know he was just hitting something, some object. We just did an 'unplugged' version of 'Time', and we said that we would have to record that, because it was really fun. But yeah that's how it goes sometimes, it's just a challenge in itself to do that, especially when people don't expect that from you, then it becomes even more interesting to do that I think.

S: Yeah definitely. Going back to the new album, I guess it's a bit of a cliché, but having heard it a few times myself, I can honestly say that I think it is your best album so far.

K: Ah thank you for that!

S: I mean would you agree with this? And how would you compare it to your previous work?

K: Yeah I do think this is our best album so far. And the reason that I think that is because, we learned a lot I think from the process of the previous album, making the previous album, what went well, what didn't go well. And I think we really kept all the elements that were good, and sort of avoided the moments where there were not necessarily our stronger points. It needed really a change of mentality and attitude to do this album I have to say. I went and did singing lessons, because I wasn't happy with my vocal performance on 'Journey Through Lands Unknown'. That was actually done-well actually the tracks were composed with Andy in mind, he was supposed to do the clean vocals...

S: Oh really?

K: Yeah, on 'Journey Through Lands Unknown'. Andy had moved to Finland, but he was going to come to record the vocals. But then about a month before the recording he said-he decided against it basically, so he didn't do it. So I had to do the vocals myself, so suddenly it

had changed. With Andy not being there and myself stepping up what I needed was really the confidence to do it. Myself, in the beginning for this new album I thought to get a new singer, an external singer, to do the album. But I remember the first track I came up with was 'Broken Statue', and I said to the band "okay guys I want you to be totally honest with me, if what I'm singing sucks just let me know so we can get another singer". They all said oh no, we don't want to get an external singer. I really needed that confidence from the band because I didn't think I was a good singer myself and I said, well, do you think I should be doing it? And the others said yes, it's your tracks, it's important that you sing what you write about, because it's your own personal stuff. So I said okay, we'll go for it.

So I started doing singing lessons, then I was thinking much more in terms of...I was very disappointed with the previous album. Not with the actual album, I think the album was great. But we were very disappointed by how misunderstood it was really by the audience. I mean we got some fantastic reviews, not everything was negative, but it was very...controversial. I mean for every person who said ah this is great, it's fantastic, there was another one who said that it was absolute rubbish. It seemed to be very polarised. And I thought well, in a sense, I'm disappointed that the audience that we have, which is quite a limited audience, it seems to be thinking very in terms of that, everything needs to be nicely in categories and everything has to sound in a certain way, according to a formula and according to the rules of doom-metal blah blah blah. But from the other side, I thought yeah it's partly them, but it's also partly us, maybe we didn't communicate the things we wanted to communicate as well.

Because at the end of the day, music is, in my view a form of communication. When I'm writing music it's because I want to communicate something with people, and of course it's like with communication, when you're speaking a language that other people don't understand, they're like, que? What did you just say? I didn't hear you. So of course in the same way, well with this album, obviously I know what I wanted to say but people don't necessarily hear the same thing. Or some people did but a lot of people didn't. So I thought that with this album, right we're going to write something, we're going to speak in a language, that a lot of people will understand. That was the idea behind the last album, which means basically, you know in more simple terms, it had to be more accessible really, in many ways. And we had to keep the best elements from 'Journey', which I think at that point was our best album, in my view, because we were just doing a lot of interesting things, but some of them worked, some of them didn't. And with the last album we wanted to keep only those that worked, and to minimise those that didn't.

So yes I think that it's our best album, and I think that it's an album that has layers, and you can listen to it several times and hear different things, you can't get bored of it easily. I think you can get bored easily, well, more easily, with 'O Solitude' or 'Amartia', because they have a certain vibe, but the vibe is there and that's all there is, and you have to be in a certain mood to listen to them, but I think the new album, it has different moods. 'Journey Through Lands Unknown' was the same in a sense because, it was an album which had different vibes in it, but then it was a bit more difficult because it had this Eastern element, and that's what we decided to leave behind this time. And all these weird instruments we had on the previous

album, like we used the santoor and the sitar, and all that stuff. It was great to use, but I thought with this album that it's back to the songs, it's all about the songs, just forget about all this trying to experiment and weird sort of stuff, just write proper songs and then we'll think about trying to be innovative and different. And I think that actually benefitted the album. Because then, we were also very critical I have to say, much more than in the past. I threw in the bin many ideas I had, because Ilia came with his own tracks and I thought ah we should keep those tracks, we should keep them. And therefore there was no space for others; we had to be very critical, about what to use and what not. So we used only really the best material we had at that particular time I think.

S: Do you find it hard to be critical in that way, to literally throw music which you've, poured your soul into, in the bin?

K: Um, well not necessarily, I mean I've done it in the past as well, but some ideas get recycled and used in other albums anyway. For instance 'The Pains of Sleep' was actually a track that should have been in 'O Solitude' but then at the time we decided against it, and it came much later, in the EP. 'Barock', again that's a track we just now did on the split CD, was actually one that I had written in the time of 'O Solitude' as well. That was going to be used on 'The Pains of Sleep' actually, that was the idea of that, but then we used 'Pavor Nocturnus' instead, so I kept the idea. So a lot of ideas are shifting and moving, or sometimes you just take a riff or an idea from one track and you throw away the rest.

The more you are in a band, in the beginning it's just you have this thing of, oh I want to record music, and just get it out and release it. You don't care what it is, you're like ohh the music is there so...I remember we were doing 'O Solitude' and I was in cloud number nine the whole time, it was like ohh this the best thing in the world, I'm making an album! I didn't care about anything, how the album sounds, how people would react, what we were doing, as long as we were doing something. But then you become more critical over the years and you start thinking, well so I've passed that stage where we just want to have our ideas recorded, now we want to do them, recorded well, and we want them to have a certain vibe and we want them to maybe like, you know, touch a certain nerve with the audience, and that's what we did really with that.

S: I mean it also feels to me like in this album there's more emotion than there has ever been before in any other Pentheist album, which is obviously quite a feat because I think Pentheist's music has always been quite emotional. And I think in turn this kind of makes it heavier in some ways as well, do you agree with this? And if so, was it intentional, or...?

K: Yeah totally, I mean, totally. I think even, you might have seen the sticker which Grau put on it, which is like, "Pentheist, the 4th album, a masterpiece of emotive doom". Well that was-we didn't write that ourselves obviously, it was Grau's idea, and so I think that's the vibe that people are getting from the tracks...that it's quite emotional, quite personal, also the interview questions that I'm seeing now are a lot about, oh this is very personal and emotional, and that's because it is. And yes I think you're right, I mean I learned to redefine

heaviness over the years. In the beginning heaviness was about, I remember my first concern in Pantheist was, how low can we tune the guitar, let's make sure it's as low as possible without, you know, whilst still being able to distinguish the chords. Not like Thee Plague of Gentlemen who were just tuning in G or something like that and then you couldn't hear the difference between the chords almost.

S: [laughs]

K: But it was like, I wanted us to sound heavy in terms of sonic violence. With the years you learn about heaviness that with the more subtle things you can be heavy, you know, Jonny Cash can be heavy, or I don't know, Leonard Cohen can be heavy. I think anyone can be heavy, it's not just about the distortion it's about the way the emotion, how much the emotion weighs on the track, sometimes you hear one piano note droning and you think ohh my god, that's so heavy! BommMMM...[makes heavy, droning piano sound] you know, and you learn that heaviness, it has the many layers to it as well. So um, yeah I think that it is very personal, it is emotional and it is heavy, because of the fact that it is very charged if you like, the tracks, because they are very honest, and they have a lot of um, you know, a lot of stuff is there that is coming right from the...if you like from the personality of those who wrote the tracks and also those who played the tracks. Because of course I may have come with an original emotion or Ilia did, but then the rest got the vibe, they understood the vibe, so they poured their heart in the way they played the bass or the drums or anything, and everything sounds even more...intense, in a sense I think.

S: So it was very much-it was intentional, you went into this album planning for it to be that way, or did it happen kind of more...

K: Um, well, no I mean, what was intentional was, as I said earlier, was more the idea of doing something that people will understand, that was really important for me. Like I say, after...that was perhaps the reaction after the previous album a bit, that I thought that people didn't understand it very well. So I wanted an album that people can really listen to it and say, I get it, I understand what these guys are trying to say and do. That was the intention but, in terms of how emotive the tracks were, it's more, I mean it was always a very personal process writing in Pantheist, but this time it wasn't just personal it was also very directed, perhaps towards; okay it has to be personal but it needs to be understood also by someone who listens to this song. And therefore we're going to keep only these things which we think are going to be appreciated by someone who knows the band and understands the band.

So we really wanted to capture the vibe of Pantheist, but without necessarily the sound of the previous albums if you know what I mean. We just wanted people to feel, ah yeah this is what I want to get out of Pantheist, but without actually sounding like an 'O Solitude' number 2 or an 'Amartia' number 2 or even a 'Journey Through Lands Unknown' number 2. It had to be its own, you know as I said earlier, it has to be its own sound, and that was the only intention really.

S: Mm...yeah I mean, I guess it's not just with the music either, I mean the artwork is quite different from previous Pantheist releases, you know perhaps more minimalist, and very unique in its own right, and the lyrics, as you've alluded to, feel more personal than ever before. I mean even the album title, it's self-titled, it very much feels like perhaps the rawest Pantheist release to date.

K: Yeah, absolutely. I mean that's right, that was the idea of the self-titled also for us, it's like it's a new start, for us it's about, you know, when do bands do self-titled albums? There could be two reasons for that. One is that they run out of inspiration, which people very often think is the case. But I think usually it's not the case, usually it's a band reinventing itself. Look at the Black album from Metallica, I mean it's actually also a self-titled album, they call it the Black album because it has a black cover. And that was a band reinventing itself in a new style. I'm just trying to think of other bands that have self-titled albums...I can't think of any at the moment but I think the bottom line is when bands do that, very often it's because they want to make a statement, and our statement was, a new start, basically we didn't want anything to distract from the music, not even the title if you know what I mean, and that's the reason that it stayed untitled. We wanted people to be like, what is this? It's almost like it's a box and I need to open it myself and find out what it is even though it doesn't say, you know; present for you, the new Pantheist album...just open it up and listen to it. Just, you know, we wanted to get people's curiosity.

And the artwork is the same, quite a bit mysterious perhaps, a bit cryptic. It's all about reflection, all the artwork is about, if you like, the reflection of something that is in real life, into perhaps an imaginary world or into something that is a reflection of real life and therefore a perception of real life. So it was very much about, the grey area between what are the facts and what we think the facts are, and what is life and what we think life is. And all the tracks are a bit like that, all the tracks are personal, but at the same time not necessarily experiences we had ourselves. But it is experiences that we could definitely identify with, experiences we could have had ourselves, or perhaps we had them but not in exactly the same way that we described them. So that is the sort of ambiguity we wanted to keep in everything and that's the reason of, you know, leaving the title out and of having the artwork more cryptic also.

S: Yeah, because I guess music or lyrics or whatever doesn't have to actually be a personal actual story as such, it doesn't have to have some sort of detailed story which is true behind it, for it to be personal. It could be very ambiguous but still have a very personal feel and reasoning behind it from the song writers.

K: Yeah absolutely.

S: And it certainly feels like that with this album. When I read the lyrics for example, obviously I don't expect the lyrics themselves to be detailing true life stories necessarily, things can be very ambiguous but still very personal and meaningful for the song writer, and in turn people can relate to that and get a lot from it.

K: Yeah that's exactly how it is. You know, writing music is a very, I think in the beginning you start thinking, when you start writing music for the first time, first it's your idea of, oh this CD, people have to understand it, because that's what I had in mind. The more you write music the more you understand that you're not much in control really, about how people- because people will always interpret it in different ways than you intended, and that's not a bad thing because that's what makes music great. The fact that in the same song people can hear so many different things, means that your song actually has something for a variety of people, because people are different from each other at the end of the day.

There are bands that deliberately do the opposite I suppose, like true doom bands, who play a very specific type of music because they want to reach a very specific type of people, who react exactly the same way to it, and they succeed but that's a very small, limited audience. But if you really do really want, as I said earlier if you see music as communication, and you really want to reach a lot of people, then I think you have to leave more subtle messages in the music. Don't just give it away, like oh here's a drum solo so that you are sure you are definitely listening to an album that has been influenced by Black Sabbath, or something like that. It has to be less deliberate, it has to be more...or well, let's say, that's what I think about it but you don't necessarily need to know what I think about it or even, you don't necessarily have to feel the same, as long as you feel something I think, that's the important thing.

S: Yeah definitely. And I guess another important thing behind all this, is that it's now over 10 years since Pantheist was first formed by yourself. Do you feel an awareness of this now, in the things that you do with the band? I mean do you feel there's more musical maturity perhaps?

K: Yes, I think there is. I mean in the beginning we did a very amateurish album, just when we had started. We first did an ambient album that was never really properly released, 'Dying Millenium'...because it was not very good, that's why. *[both laugh]*

So then I think the important thing there, rather than the actual sound, was more the intention, and the intention was, let's do something personal, already there, and that's why it was important. You know, we were doing something that might have sucked, but at least it was personal, it was something where there was an idea behind it, and that's how we continued. And you know, building further on that idea, you gain experience with each album you do. You learn the things that work, the things that don't work, and you also learn more and more to appreciate the fact that you are a band, and not a project, and not like, just a few individuals that will just create something and create something the same under all circumstances. That's not us because even if the line-up has stayed the same, in 10 years down the line we will play the tracks differently, we will sound differently, because people change, and they perceive things differently.

So yeah you gain experience, and as I said before, the important thing when you continue as a band is not so much, bringing the music out so that people will hear it. It's more about, you

start thinking about more and more things and you want to challenge yourself, and yeah you want to bring out music, but it needs to...the standards are becoming higher and higher. And it becomes more detailed also I guess, because well you start thinking about things, and little things even in the arrangements like the type of sound you use in the keyboards or the guitar, the number of times you repeat a certain section, you start to become more and more aware of these things. I guess in the beginning these things are more spontaneous, until you know, you're feeling your way but there comes a moment when you're thinking right, let's also think about what we do, you know sometimes it's a good thing to also know where you're going. But it's a balance of finding...not becoming too deliberate, because then you become what we said earlier with My Dying Bride, then you become formulaic. But I think there's a difference between the chaotic approach that most bands have in the beginning, where you just do something, which is usually the philosophy, and becoming over-deliberate. There's a very big grey area between, and that's where you need to move I think. And that's what we did I think.

S: And going back to the 10 years, do you think, has the Pantheist experience changed much for you since then, the experience if you will, as the sole surviving member, well and the founding member?

K: Do you mean like my experience?

S: Yeah, of the band, and things surrounding it.

K: Yeah it has changed a lot. But that's also not surprising because, you know, we used to be based in Belgium and then we went to England, and then even in England the line-up has changed a million times in the meanwhile. So it's just an adventure really, you're part of an adventure, you just have to take it as it comes really. Because what I've learned is you that cannot predict every step of it. I mean last year for instance we played two gigs in London, one in Ashton-under-Lyne (which is close to Manchester), and then one in Moscow; who would have thought we would play in Moscow. But you get these offers and you go along with it. Or someone comes and says, like Mirek from Gallileous, let's do a split CD, with a concept album about superstition. That's not the kind of thing that you can think of really casually, but people come up with these weird ideas and you think yeah, why not, let's do something weird.

So everything sort of, evolves, but you just have to go along with it, and look out for what possibilities you have, and just take advantage of them. So the experience for me in this band is like, well first it's about personal expression of course. As I said before that's very important.

But also, you also want to have a good time, I cannot deny that, in a band you don't want to just-I hate to be in a band where it's the whole time arguments and this or that, and I think we're quite lucky in Pantheist, despite the fact that it's changed so much. Most people who are attracted to this band, are people who have a certain personality that fits in this band.

Because I don't know, we don't attract any, evil misanthropists, or people who think they should destroy the whole world or something like that. We are people who like a laugh, who like to joke, who like to have a good time, and we are very serious about our music, but we just all take it with a pinch of salt at the same time. Because let's face it, if you write about depression and mental health problems and all that jazz that we write about, you don't want to be-I mean some people think that you should talk the talk and walk the walk, you know like cutting your own wrists for instance just to prove that you mean it or something, well that's not really for us. We are all about emotion, as you said earlier, about trying to express ourselves and emotion, and I think emotions are universal things. I know, you know, I can put myself in the head of someone who wants to commit suicide and write about that, but it doesn't mean that I would like to do that myself, it doesn't mean that I would like to cut my wrists or do something like that, in fact I think that life has a lot to offer.

But the irony is that when it comes to music and expressing emotions, just writing about happy stuff is just not interesting enough, that's part of the problem. So we end up writing about dark stuff, without necessarily being dark people ourselves. We're quite sociable people I'd like to think, generally speaking, we're quite easy going but, you know, we think about this stuff, we think about the dark side of life. And of course I think you need a certain sensitivity for it, there are a lot of people who don't care about the dark side of life, who just want to hear only about the good things, and get upset if you speak about the terrible things that are going on in life, and try to change the conversation topic. But you know, we're not like that, because we feel we should confront all these things head on. I mean every day you hear about people being burned to death or being killed by other people. I work with victims of crime as you know, so I also hear a lot of not very pleasant things, and I like to think about these things, and perhaps write about these things sometimes. It doesn't necessarily mean that I'm morbid or something.

S: Yeah...and do you feel proud, looking at what Pantheist have achieved in the years since you formed the band?

K: Yes I feel very proud of it. I mean I have to say, every single album...I know, and bless them I have them on Facebook as well and everything, all these...friends, people that I don't really know, who are there because they like, 'O Solitude' usually, that's the reason they are there, because they like the first album. And I do feel a bit for them because they're like, oh Kostas yeah you've got a new album and it's going to sound like 'O Solitude' etcetera...

S: [laughs]

K: And I have to smile a bit with that, but you know, I don't, no...I mean it's not going to sound like 'O Solitude' that's what I'm telling them. But I wouldn't want to insult them at the same time, because I can see where they're coming from, and at the time when we wrote it of course we meant everything we wrote, and every album is the same. But I will never be able to write the same album twice. 'O Solitude' was very much about, well as the title implies, feelings of loneliness and solitude really, which is exactly what I felt at the time. Then

‘Amartia’ is more of a philosophical sort of concept, ‘Journey Through Lands Unknown’ is about trying to understand yourself, and this new album has a lot of different topics really. And yeah we’re proud of all of them, because they all have something different to offer, and something personal and different. I can see their flaws, I mean the more time passes the more you see the flaws of your previous albums, and you smile upon them, but I don’t think in music you should strive for perfection, I think perfection is boring. I mean perfection, when people talk about perfect albums usually, I listen to them and then it’s the sort of album where everything sounds as it’s supposed to sound, crystal clear production, Peter Tägtgren usually doing the mix or whatever, the exact right amount of hooks and riffs and everything is well balanced...well balanced is just boring I think. I like ill-balanced music. Therefore that’s why I’m attracted to more weird stuff. So yeah for me music is wonderful because it’s not perfect if you like, because it’s personal, and personal cannot be perfect, perfect is something that everyone would like, and I don’t want to write something that everyone likes, because of course then it’s not personal anymore. Otherwise you have to write pop music if you want to do something that everyone would like in exactly the same way. As I said earlier you just need to keep it subtle really, and individual, that’s very important.

S: Moving on a little bit...

K: Yeah I lost my train of thought didn’t I...

S: No no not at all, no that’s great thank you! [both laugh]

I was going to ask, I’ve seen Pantheist live a few times now and I’m a big fan of the effort that you seem to put in to kind of make each show special. So I wanted to ask really, how do you find the experience of performing live as an individual and as a band, and what have been some of your best and worst experiences within that environment?

K: Ah yeah I mean live is quite an adventurous thing of course, when you play live. In the beginning we were not really...I didn’t think of playing live at all, it was a project, a studio project almost, that’s how Pantheist started. It’s just by accident that we started playing live, it just happened that we were in a country where doom metal bands started to pick up, and we were asked to play at the Dutch Doom Day, that was the first gig we ever did, by Pim from Officium Triste, who was organising it at the time. He asked me a few times and I initially said oh no we don’t play live, no no no, and then after he asked a few times I said why not, why not just see for the sake of it, so yeah we got a line-up together and we started playing live.

Well the good about playing live is, obviously with the type of music you cannot really party really, you can’t have a big party, other bands that I go and see that are playing like, I don’t know, some sort of, how do they call it, Viking metal or pagan metal or whatever and they go, ohh beer jug music! And that’s the party music, and it’s like hundreds of people arms in arms and singing...

S: [laughs]

K: Well good for them but that's not really what Pantheist would be about live [chuckles]. It's not, well we're just not like that, that's not what we do. So I guess for me the best gigs were those that, it felt like there was a connection with the people there, that you know, you can see it in their eyes, not necessarily dancing around like crazy, but they can express it in different ways. You can see sometimes they just stay still, and sort of, try to absorb the music, you know. But you feel it, you feel this, it's hard to explain but you feel there's a connection with what there is.

There was when we played in Poland, that was great, and it was a bit more a drinking beer jugs sort of thing, but that was people in their own way, expressing how they were getting into it. While the opposite happened in the same year when we played at the Frontline, that was a week before the gig in Poland actually, where we played in front of, I don't know, 20 people or something. And they were just standing about, 10 metres away with their arms crossed in front of them, not moving again, but not in a good way, because sometimes people are not immobile because they're trying to absorb the music...

S: [laughs]

K: But that was more because they just didn't, you know, you can tell, the non-verbal signs, crossing your arms means like, I'm not quite sure about this, I'm going to keep my distance. So that's how it felt like. So really you get different vibes. You also get some crazy stories, I mean...I can tell about this guy at our second gig, who sort of, was getting quite a bit bananas, having taken some drugs probably, pills, and started biting his bottle, and started bleeding all over the place, and they had to take him out of there, probably to some mental home. And then there was the gig in Moscow, where we had some really crazy fans following us around and asking us, someone had written down all sorts of questions. They were written in Russian, and then they translated them, a friend of theirs translated them in English, so he was following us around, and occasionally would ask, I don't know as I was coming out of the toilet for instance, they would ask like, "so Kostas, what's the meaning of life?" or something like that. I thought that was wonderful, it was great.

S: [laughs] Yeah you had your own stalkers!

K: Yeah it was brilliant! I really had a great time. [laughs] Yeah for me it's just the weirdness that makes it really, when you're playing that music that we do. And you find it in metal, you don't find it easily in the more-in pop music, because there it's more serious. Metal I think, doesn't take itself too seriously, therefore you get a lot of eccentrics who do all sorts of weird stuff, and that makes it more interesting. But yeah, those are the gigs that I enjoy. The connection is very important because you don't want to be playing, even if it's five-six hundred people that are there, if they just yawn, it's just, you just want them to be part of what you're doing. I understand sometimes bands doing something extreme to get their audience's attention. We're never going to do that, but occasionally I also shout things at

them or invite hecklers or whatever, just to make it a bit more interesting really, to engage people in what you do.

S: Yeah...I mean how does it feel like, I mean obviously bands are in a privileged position in a way, to be able to experience this thing of standing on a stage and communicating their music to people, what does it feel like when you do feel as if you have this connection with people in the music you're expressing?

K: Ah yeah it feels wonderful, because as I said earlier, music is about, well for me at least, it's about communication. So that's what it's all about really, when you, you know, there's a certain idea to express and you feel that people actually have received the idea and they bring it back to you in their own way, in the way they react, you can see that they understand what it's all about. And that's wonderful because then you feel...satisfaction, of "yes!", that is what I am doing it for basically, that's literally what it is. That's why, really for me music is its own goal really. I mean it's not, trying to reach any other goal than this, trying to communicate with people really, that's the goal of music, I don't think...well, I suppose you can give yourself other goals, like you want to make money, get 'chicks', whatever, that a lot of bands...

S: Though I guess those two things probably aren't linked with Pantheist's kind of music...

K: Well, you'd be surprised...[laughs]...no, well, definitely with the money part, forget about it!

S: [laughs] I won't print that bit...

K: [laughs] Ahh, print whatever you want! But yeah, it's just you know, it's a connection really, just generally it's about, you know, just really the feeling of "yes!", that's what we are doing it for, that's why you make music, and if people react to it, then they give that satisfaction.

S: Yeah...do you ever, I mean do you always enjoy playing live? Are there moments when you are intimidated perhaps by it, or you don't enjoy it?

K: Umm, yeah there are moments that sometimes, you are becoming a bit too self-conscious, which is...I think the best moments live are when you lose yourself in the performance. Because then, time stands still, space stands still, you feel like it's a band, but it's a proper band, it's a whole a unit, it's not just four or five individuals doing something different on stage. You're like, so much absorbed into it that it feels like, it's a mystical sort of thing, it's almost like you're not yourself anymore, you're part of a bigger unit really. And that's the band, with capitals, that's playing in that moment and you're part of it. And those are the great moments. And the less good moments are when, well perhaps when you feel as though there's not much connection, not necessarily with the people off the stage but sometimes with the people on the stage as well, if someone's not having a good day or whatever. And then of

course you become like, self-conscious, you start thinking too much, about oh this guy's looking I wonder what he thinks, etcetera, and you don't want to be thinking about these things, you want to be absorbed into your performance.

S: Yeah...and moving onto a different subject again, of course the kind of music which Pantheist plays isn't mainstream by any stretch of the imagination really, and even within your traditional fan base like you've alluded to, some of your music has proved controversial. So what drives you to carry on, given you've been going for more than 10 years now, what's driven you to keep going?

K: Yeah there is an inner need I think, to make music really, again to communicate, it's just something that you have. I mean, people have different ways to express themselves. People like to dance, I don't I hate dancing, but some people like to do that. People like to, I don't know, to go to the movies, whatever, all sorts of things that they feel that, is some time for themselves really, something that they do for themselves. Some people like to involve other people in their activities, others not. When it comes to self expression, in a sense, creating music is very solitary, you do it for yourself. But then that's only half the joy, the other half is bringing your ideas to the band and saying hey, this is my idea, and let's see how the band are going to-and first you're a bit anxious about how the rest of the band are going to, are they going to understand what you're doing. But then it's also about the joy of seeing others picking it up, and playing your track, it's great, it's fantastic, you feel that connection.

So what drives me is really that satisfaction of going through all these stages. So really, first the idea, ohh I've got a great idea for a track, it gives you a lot of satisfaction, bringing everything together into one song. Then seeing the band adding their own stuff into it, and sometimes changing your idea, in a sense putting their personal stuff in, and putting in points of view that you would not have thought of yourself, I find it very...very nice. I mean some people are very particular about their tracks, ohh no you have to play exactly it that way, for me not at all. I mean for me it's about the main idea, I bring it in, but I like it actually, I want people to come up with their own stuff I want people to put their personal stuff in there, because that's how it works best I find. So it's really the next stage, seeing the satisfaction of that, everything coming together as I say, and everyone getting it. And we all, everyone wants it to be a great track, so they all add something to it. Then of course the next stage is recording what you have captured, which is the satisfaction layer by layer, you see everything building up. And the next thing is just bringing it to the public, and hoping that they will also get the same vibe.

So you have also the enjoyment of reading a good review, or an interview question that makes you think; well that interviewer knows what we're all about, it's all very important I think. It's all, all these different processes that give you the satisfaction of thinking, yeah that's what I'm doing it for. There's all these sort of layers, and all these different stages that you go through every time, and yet it's exciting every time, it feels like new every time, no matter how many albums you've done, you're doing something new and you forget about the past. It's just about what I'm doing now, and you want to have the same excitement again.

Yeah it's a bit-it can be quite addictive, I can understand the artists who want to be recording until they drop dead, artists that want be playing live until they drop dead, which is the other thing, because they want again to recreate the same connection with the audience. Yeah it's a wonderful feeling really, making music. Especially when you don't do it for the money, there's no pressure whatsoever, you do it for yourself and you enjoy doing it.

S: Yeah...I mean, I must admit that any music that I've ever made, I've found it very difficult the idea of sharing it with other people, in terms of in a band context, I mean, do you find that hard? What I'm saying is, I'm perhaps quite a control freak, so how do you manage to stop yourself from being like that, and allowing others to change it potentially, and to shape it, play a part in shaping it?

K: Well I think it's a personality thing, I mean Ilia is more of a control freak, with his compositions, he likes them to be in a certain way, a specific way, he was telling me to play the keyboards and things like that, even though he can't play the keyboards himself...

S: [laughs]

K: But that's because he has very strong ideas of how every instrument should be played. But for me it was always, you know especially the more the years passed, it becomes stronger the feeling of, I want something that everyone can feel something in. So if I come up with an idea and people say, hmm I'm not quite sure, but maybe if we do this, then you know, change it slightly and then it'll work better, if I feel that that will actually help the composition, then that's what it's all about, it's all about improving the song really. So for me nobody has the ultimate say in knowing what a good song is, I mean everyone should be having a say in a band, that's why they're in the band, otherwise you just hire session musicians and do exactly what you want.

Also if you look at the history of music, to be perfectly honest, the best bands are those which have more than one creative person if you like, those that have several people. It will add something to the band, and that's because one person cannot be critical enough I think, it's as simple as that. In my head I might think I have the perfect composition, but that perfection is matched as soon as other people listen to it and they start criticising it, because you think aaah...you know, the first reaction is, ahh no, you're going to take away my child from me! *[both laugh]* But actually after you've got over this initial, oh, I feel so insulted because you don't like the original...when you think about, when the feedback people give is constructive then you start thinking about "yeah but actually, you know I see where they're coming from now, and that's going to make the song better". It's really about making the song better, that's very important I think

S: So also perhaps in a way that can be even more enjoyable, than just making a song yourself. The fact that you've actually, something which has originally come from you, but which you've created with other people, is that even perhaps more enjoyable?

K: Yeah absolutely, it is. I mean it starts very solitary as I said earlier, but it is actually a social process at the end of the day, how can it not be social. I mean you create music and you want to communicate it so, you need someone to communicate it to, so therefore it has to be social. Therefore I find it very important for anyone in the band, and of course the people, what we call the fans, outside the band, who listen to the music, to identify with what we are doing. And you can only do it if you-I think it's important though that you put somewhere a barrier, for instance the fans, they only come in after the album is recorded. I don't think they should have any say...I see sometimes bands, it's very weird some years ago I just couldn't believe it, I saw the guy from Worship saying on the Doom-metal.com forums, right this Sunday we have tele-conference or something like that, who wants to join me, which fans want to join me, because I have some ideas and I'm very anxious, because they might not really fit in the, basically in the formula of Worship if you like, and I want to hear whether you think I should go ahead and do it. And I thought, what, are you actually asking people to decide for you, what musical direction to take? That is just unbelievable, I just cannot identify with that sort of thinking.

For me it's like, the fans only come later, they have a say, but only after the album is recorded, and you keep that in mind when you do your next album, but not-it's very important that they don't have a say before the album is out I think. But it's very important that the band have a say, because otherwise you lose your critical sense. If it's only you, even if you composed everything as I did in 'O Solitude', you need people to listen to it and add their own stuff, because you yourself can never be 100% critical, so you know, it's going to be flawed unless you get people to add their own stuff. And at the end of the day, why are they in the band if they're not going to be able to add their own personal, you know, their heart and soul into it. Otherwise, it should be a project, not a band, and this is a band.

S: I mean talking about the fans' interpretation of Pantheist, as you've alluded to already, you know, the reception to different albums has been quite different, and perhaps when Pantheist first came onto the scene it was very much within a certain context, and people maybe looked at it within that, and maybe pigeon holed it a little bit. I mean I personally think that, you've kind of said yourself, even 'O Solitude' was very kind of, different from '1000 Years' and was quite experimental within its self. But obviously since then Pantheist have gone even further with each album perhaps, in experimenting and trying different things, and breaking new ground and not necessarily confining yourselves to any particular genre. So do you find it quite hard, do you find it difficult to take, when you do see some of the responses of people, who were in the past really big fans of you guys but...I mean you know, one things I've heard a lot of people say is that, with 'Journey', oh you know, I really like the second half of the album, because they're the more slow, doom metal type tracks. I mean do you find that stuff hard to take?

K: Um, well I did, in the beginning, when it started to come out. Again because it was that frustration of, you wanted to communicate something, and it didn't...because I felt a lot of people just didn't understand what it was all about. 'Journey' was not about playing experimental funeral doom. Put that on record please! *[both laugh]* Because a lot of people,

that's how they described it, it's like, ohh they wanted to play some weird experimental funeral doom, and they failed because it's not real funeral doom! That's the whole point, it's not funeral doom.

But in a sense, it is a journey. I mean the album, the title says it itself. And it's about sort of, taking the listener through, different sort of, if you like, esoteric paths. It's all about self-reflection, it's about understanding yourself, it's about all these different sort of aspects of your personality, that you want to bring in. So 'Journey Through Lands Unknown' takes you through all these different stages. Other albums were doing different things. Yeah 'O Solitude' was more about, I suppose was more funeral doom, because it was more about recreating that feeling of emptiness, and solitude and loneliness. 'Amartia' was more that religious sort of feeling, of being totally subjected to a god, or the idea you have of a certain god, and wanting to get back to god by committing the cardinal sins, and just challenging god almost. So you know, you hope, I guess I could say that 'O Solitude' especially, it was very, it was easy to capture, or for people to get the main idea, because the main idea is simple. It's about loneliness, an album about loneliness, and everyone can identify with loneliness, there weren't many layers to it really, just different aspects of loneliness if you like.

But then I think the problems started with 'Amartia', when perhaps I started to hear the first moans there, of people saying, ohh this doesn't sound like 'O Solitude'. And that's when I started to get a bit wound up, because you know, who says I wanted or we wanted this to sound like 'O Solitude'. And I understand that fans want to hear a certain thing, but they have to respect also the fact that the band has a certain, a certain philosophy and that if we do 'O Solitude' number 2, it's not going to sound like 'O Solitude' and so they're going to be disappointed anyway. Because it's going to be something that tries to sound like 'O Solitude' and therefore it's going to fail, everything I find that tries to sound like something else sounds forced. I mean no disrespect to Paradise Lost for instance, in their last few albums they've tried to recreate their old sound, and without saying that it's bad or anything, I can tell that it's more, a band rationally thinking, oh let's try to do something like the old days, you know, to try to hopelessly recapture what we lost over the years, like that feeling we had on the earlier album. It doesn't work like that. And I know that a lot of people buy the album and say, ohh great because they've gone back to the old style, but I think it's a bit fake, I don't think it's very fair.

I think you have to be honest to yourself and being honest to yourself is like...for instance, I don't know, something like Cathedral, I don't like most of the albums they did after the early stuff, but I totally respect them. Because they're a band that says, 'Forest of Equilibrium', we were depressed at the time, we made a very depressed album, if we were going to do it again now that we're not depressed, it's going to sound forced, it's going to sound like someone hopelessly trying to recapture how you felt so many years ago, and it's not going to be the same. So yeah, it's just about trying to find the common ground isn't it, with the listeners. And I think we definitely found it with 'O Solitude', and I'm very confident we'll find it with the new album, because that's what it's all about, it's about communication, and sometimes you just move away from what people expect from you, and that's when it gets a bit

frustrating. But then you also have to draw lessons from it, and that's what we did. We listened to ourselves, we thought, what is it really that defines us as a band, what are the things that work, and you know, just tried to work further on them really.

S: I totally agree, and I mean it's interesting, maybe in a way history will-it will be interesting to see how history judges Pantheist really. I mean when you look at other bands...for example going back to My Dying Bride, I'm sure at the time 'The Angel and the Dark River' was probably received with a very mixed reception, but now it's looked back on as one of their best albums. So it will be interesting to see how, what the responses to Pantheist over-looking at a perspective with more hindsight would be.

K: I'm curious too yeah.

S: And so now Pantheist are signed to Grau, which I presume you're very happy about...

K: Yes.

S: I mean the band's obviously had some experience with different record labels, have these experiences, you know, how do you look back on these experiences now, and have they impacted upon your view of the music industry more generally, or certainly within the kind of music which Pantheist writes?

K: You mean the experience of changing labels or?

S: Well yeah, just with your working with record labels.

K: Yes, ah in general. Well yeah I mean working with labels is just something you have to learn. Also and again, when you start as a band, or when we started in the beginning, I wasn't thinking about a label, it was about as I said; I want to record an album, music, and bring it out. And for me it was about making CD-Rs really, and putting them on the website, and then maybe 100 people buy that something, for me that was what it was all about. The label idea came later, not because I was looking for them, I didn't even understand what a label was all about, it was the labels coming to us at the time and saying, oh can we hear your promo, your demo, and we were just like, oh, okay. So after a while I realised that there were of course advantages to that, which is, you know, if you have a label then you don't need to do the promotion yourself, you don't need to waste any time going out there and saying, ohh we are great, listen to us, because the label's going to do it for you.

And more importantly also I realised after a while that well, the more stuff you record, the more the standards get higher and higher in terms of sound quality and everything. And you actually then need to record in a professional studio, and if you do that, then of course it's going to cost a lot of money, and you don't really have a lot of money, but the labels has, so therefore it's in your best interests to work with a label. That's when the labels started. So from my point of view you need the labels really, and they need you. I mean you see

sometimes bands say today ahh, you can do without labels nowadays, and I say no you can't. Well unless you are happy to go out and sell yourself, and promote yourself, and do all the jazz that labels do, and distribute your stuff. It's all nice and well if you have the time to do it, but if you don't I don't see why you should sort of, deviate from the main idea of being in a band, which is to play music basically, as far as I'm concerned. The business side should be left to business men, not to bands. And labels are run by business men, who like music, that's what it is basically. Or business women, sorry, sexist remark... *[both laugh]*

So um, yeah the experiences with labels I mean, I guess are both positive and negative. We had, I mean as you know over the years certain problems, certain frustrations, with the limitations that labels have. But yeah we just tried to make the best out of it really, tried to get the best elements of it, and not be pressured into a corner of, you have to sound like this, or you have to do that, etcetera etcetera. I think you have to be willing as a band to work a bit yourself, to do your own promotion, to do interviews, to do gigs, that sort of thing, otherwise what's the point. But at the same time, it's good to be able to feel that the label is more of a partner, that helps you sort of, it takes care of the business side of things and you do the music side of things. And without saying that it has to be totally separated but, you specialise in one and they specialise in the other basically.

S: Have you ever felt that that relationship has become a bit oppressive? Like perhaps they've been coming too far into your area, that kind of thing?

K: Not so much with the type of labels we've worked with because we're very-I've heard of bands that definitely have that experience, but that happens when, let's face it when bands get successful, and we're not commercially successful really. I think in commercial terms probably you know, most bigger labels would laugh at our sales, like haha, that's not even going to bring me back my money. But yeah it's also linked with promotion of course, it's linked with the fact that the labels we've worked with, so far at least I don't know with Grau yet we'll just have to see how it evolves. But so far I've felt that there were huge limitations in terms of how much they can help to push us to, get a bit out of the, funeral doom if you like, tag. But you know for us it's more, there wasn't, yes there was a bit of involvement of a label trying to push, oh can you change the order of the tracks or can you do this or that. And our answer was always no, and that was it. Because to be honest I think that's how it should be really.

It's up to us really how we want to do things, the album is ours, their task is to sell it basically, as far as I'm concerned. It sounds a bit harsh, but you know...I mean there were some compromises, with 'O Solitude' it has two re-recorded tracks off the demo, off '1000 Years', and it doesn't have 'The Pains of Sleep' as I said earlier, because these two tracks replaced it. And that was Rami from Firebox, he wanted, he really liked the demo and wanted at least some of tracks off the demo so that's a compromise we came to. He wanted actually to re-release the demo in the beginning, and we said no, we said we want to do a proper album, but as a compromise we're going to re-record some stuff off the demo, to at least have

an album that includes that aspect of it. So yeah sometimes we do compromise, so there you go.

S: And how do you feel about the relationship you've just began with Grau?

K: Ah it's great so far you know, it's very good. I mean Tom has his head screwed on really, in terms of business terms he really knows exactly what he can do and what the limitations are. He was very clear from the beginning, he said I can do this and I can do that, and I cannot do that. For instance he says I cannot do gigs and too much, when it's not really anything to do with me, I'm a label and a mail-order, that's what I'm doing. And yeah distribution, a certain budget that he gave, but he was clear about that from the beginning, and when there's clarity, it's easy to work with someone. You might not necessarily...you might want more, but let's face it you don't always get everything you want in life, as long as there's clarity and you know exactly what the other party is offering, it's either yes or no. And we said yeah, what he, what Grau offer is definitely satisfactory in terms of what we expect from a label, and we went along with it and so far yeah, everything is running very smoothly I have to say.

S: Funnily enough you actually reminded me of what I was going to ask you before earlier actually...

K: Oh, brilliant stuff! *[both laugh]*

S: So cheers for that! In terms of people, people always defining you as funeral doom, I mean I guess this is a recurring problem with bands. Like, you know, I mean, Anathema for example, have never seemed to have been able to really break out of their original fan base. I mean you go to Anathema gigs now and it's still people wearing doom metal t-shirts, but obviously they're not playing that music at all anymore.

K: Doom, yes.

S: I mean within that fan base they're very popular, but they haven't seemed to have been able to break out of that. I mean, do you feel that is something which is plaguing Pantheist a little bit, do you think you'll be able to get out of that a bit more yourselves, or do you even want to get out of that necessarily?

K: Well I don't want to get ourselves totally out of it. I think there's a misconception that comes actually from the funeral doom fans themselves, that doom metal is all about what they think is doom metal, which is not true, because what they think is doom metal is a very limited part of doom metal. And for my part, we still play doom metal as much as we did, even more now maybe in some senses. It might not be funeral doom but, it might be for instance stuff that people who are more into traditional doom can more identify with, because its proper songs if you like, and not soundscapes.

No it doesn't really bother me, I mean you know, I don't expect-and why should we at the end of the day, I mean it's the same band, if you're proud of what you have done why would you want to be oblivious to what you've done even if it doesn't-if it's not necessarily what you would be doing nowadays. But you did it at some point, because you know, you felt that there was a need for it. So you just have to embrace it, and if you see out there fans that appreciate what you do then you respect that. That's why we keep playing songs from 'O Solitude' live, because we know that there are always some people in the audience who want us to do that. Most of the gigs we play at least one track from 'O Solitude'. Yeah it's just what it is, you just over the years...what people have to understand I think is like, as a band, you're going to be evolving every time, you're going to be doing something. Every time you record an album, you're going to add more stuff to your repertoire, which decreases the, you know, the chances that you're going to play many tracks from X or Y album, because you have too much material. And you would hope as a band that in the audience people would like to hear something from each album that you have made. So you just have to be realistic about...and yeah we look at that sometimes, what sort of gig it is, what sort of audience, then we decide on the basis of that, let's go more to play more earlier stuff, or let's go concentrate on the newer stuff or whatever.

But no we don't want to forget really, you are what you are, we are proud of everything we've done. We've done a lot of different things that's the main thing, we need to fit them all together in a live set, but we can, and as long as we can...I think the point where I will feel right, with this album that I'm making now, I cannot almost play any old tracks because it will sound too different, then it's the point I think where you break up as a band. And you start, you change your name and you continue under a different name. What's the point of that you know, for instance, if tomorrow we decided to play, I don't know, gothic rock, just saying something...although some people already think that we already do...*[both laugh]* If we start to do that, then we might have to say well, that's it, because there's no point playing one day something that sounds like gothic rock, and now we're going to play a track from 'O Solitude', or a track from 'Journey Through Lands Unknown', it doesn't make any sense. So we just have to, you know, to draw the line. As long as there's that continuity, you can include everything you've done I think in the past. Look at My Dying Bride, they still play tracks from their EPs even, let alone the albums, and they fit perfectly in the set, so why not. Yeah, it's all possible.

S: Talking about music more generally, what would you say has been some of the more exciting music which you've been-which you've found more recently?

K: Um, generally?

S: Yeah, yeah.

K: Well, what is playing now is great. It's quite weird, Murkrat, something released by Aesthetic Death Records, it's like um, I don't know I was just going to say funeral doom, but with a very eerie voice. It sounds a bit like some demented Dead Can Dance sort of...

S: [laughs] Yeah, it's good!

K: Yeah, it's very bizarre, I like bizarre stuff. Other good stuff, oh well there's always a lot of different stuff, I'm just trying to think of stuff I'm into lately...well I liked the latest Anathema album, I thought that was really great, but then I liked also the last Burzum album, so very different stuff, umm...

S: I mean that's interesting because I guess it in a way demonstrates the range of music which I presume-I mean would you say, do you draw a lot of influence from bands generally now?

K: Yes I do...I mean, well, the things is the older you get the more...you have a database in your head of all the different sounds that you have heard. But I don't necessarily, I'm not necessarily influenced by everything that I like, sometimes you can in a perverse way be influenced by stuff that you don't find particularly interesting, but then somehow it kind of burns in your head, a certain riff, a certain idea, whatever, and then you want to do something around that idea. And a lot of stuff that I really like, like Portishead, I never thought in my head let's do some scratching sounds on a Pantheist album or play some trip hop. I could listen to trip hop the whole day but I cannot actually make trip hop, because I'm not interested in making trip hop. So it's not necessarily what I listen to I want to make, which I think is good because then it becomes too obvious, because then you end up just sounding like other bands because then you try to recreate what you listen to. And I think really when you make music it's more than that, it's not just; oh I want to make music because I listen to X and Y and I like them. It's more about; I want to express a certain feeling. It's very vague in the beginning; I don't know how to do it. Then you feel, you know, as a musician, I can do it through music. It's just a great feeling of; I want to get this out. And sometimes there's a mix of different-there's a mix of classical music, funeral doom and Greek traditional music, almost coming at once, and somehow the cacophony becomes like, I don't know, I'm saying something, 'Journey Through Lands Unknown' or something. *[both laugh]* It's just a matter of, you know, just expressing yourself.

Yeah and just going back to music, stuff that I'm listening to, I mean Spotify is a big influence, because basically through Spotify I can listen to all the stuff that I would used to look at...

S: But there's only certain stuff that you can listen to on there...

K: Yeah I know it's a bit annoying...

S: Hopefully one day they'll get onto the doom metal genre haha, Pantheist will be on there one day...

K: Yes well I am asking Grau already to do that, I think it's very important to be on things like Spotify. I think people, and it's probably going to bring us onto the endless discussion about illegal downloading and the one or the other. But for me, it's important than people can listen to stuff before they buy it. I know because some people say like, oh who's that idiot, Bon Jovi, came out a few weeks ago, slagging off the music-basically the fans that, you know-where's the mystery of the past where people used to go to the CD store and buy something just by looking at the sleeve without having listened to it. Yeah it's all nice and well and very romantic, but it's done mate, just get over it, we're in a new era now. And you know, what is wrong with people listening first to something before they buy it, I mean I don't see anything wrong with that.

And for yourself you might decide, and I would totally respect that, I mean you said that also in the beginning, when I gave you the tracks of the new album and you said, well I'm not sure whether I want to listen to it yet. But I think that's your own choice, that's very important, but I don't think you should really, impose it on other people; no no no, you cannot listen to the album...because, you know, some people might decide to do it and some others not. I mean today's society is all about choice, and it's very important that people have that choice. So something like Spotify gives you the choice. I mean I listen to so much stuff, that I've seen things a million times in the record shop but never bothered to listen, because of the hassle of having to ask to put the headphones on. And now I just go onto to Spotify, click click, and you listen to it. And oh, ah, that was actually better than I thought! I bought some of that stuff. So what's wrong so with that? It's a new era of music really, in general I think.

S: Yeah...and it'll be interesting to see how this new era affects underground music, I mean for a few years already a lot of more underground bands have been quite willing to put a lot of their music on the internet, yourselves included, for free anyway. I mean obviously not whole albums necessarily, but certainly some of their music, and it'll be interesting to see how this does affect them, because of course you'd associate it with fans who are more willing to...I mean certainly speaking from my own experience, I've been listening to what might be called underground music for many years, and I've always kind of, had a policy of you know, finding out about bands, listening to them on the internet, and then buying their music if I like it. So perhaps for underground bands, this new phenomenon isn't necessarily such a big deal.

K: Yeah I mean, I know there's labels, I know definitely Tom from Grau is concerned about illegal downloading and he doesn't like at all anything to do with people, downloading stuff or listening to stuff before it's released. And I can respect that, but I'm thinking, it's inevitable, it's going to happen anyway. It's going to leak somewhere, someone will listen to it, and that's it really. And well I'll tell you something because anyway the interview is not going to be out before the release: the album has been leaked. *[both laugh]* I'm not going to tell Tom that yet, but...*[both laugh]* I've heard from someone else that the album has leaked, so there you go, in the biggest secrecy etcetera. And I definitely did not leak it because I would never do that, and I'm sure nobody else in the band did, but I don't know, someone

along the line shared it, and now people are listening to it already. Inevitable I think, you just have to learn to live with it really. It's just one of those things that happens today.

S: Yeah, I mean it's funny, because some of my favourite albums, I confess have been leaked versions, which I've heard, you know but I don't see, like you said I guess a lot of it's down to choice isn't it...

K: Yeah I mean, if you decide, because even if it's leaked it's still your choice, I don't want to listen to the leaked version I'll wait until it's out.. I mean I'm just, I'm one of these people who just doesn't even bother to listen to new albums, because if I want to get something I'm waiting until it's out and then I'll buy it. I'm not like, ohh my god I need to hear it today and not tomorrow...it's like, I'll wait until it's out, and then hear it, I have no problem with that. But if you really can't help yourself, then just go out and download it and listen to it.

S: It's ironic in a way because perhaps people are more willing to listen to leaked stuff from bands that they don't actually, aren't as interested in if you know what I mean. Like the leaked albums I've listened to have been bands that I haven't really heard before, so I was just like, well I'll check this out because I can. While for example with Pantheist I would be happy to wait, because...

K: Yeah exactly, and what's wrong with that? That's exactly what I'm saying. I mean it's all about educating people really about music. I think it's important, just to re-educate people, first of all re-educate labels and the music industry that times have changed, deal with it, there's nothing you can do about it, the time that people will stop downloading, will not come back. People are downloading music now, that's what is happening. But, also re-educating the fans about, well it's all nice and well downloading stuff, but have you ever stopped to think about, you know for instance, if you decide, ah I can't be bothered to buy this album, even though I like it, I don't want to, now that I have the leaked album...I mean I used to have it occasionally, I will never forget someone who was asking about the first album, he came on the Doom-metal.com forum, and he was asking, he said, ohh I just downloaded the Pantheist album, can someone send me the artwork also then I have a perfect CD. And I replied "yeah sure mate, do you want me to send you a free CD as well?"

S: [both laugh] Here's a free t-shirt!

K: Yeah a free t-shirt also...but you know, that's the thing, that's the other extreme I think, and I think it's important that you educate people what it's about, do you actually realise music, it's not, it's not born in one day. It's something that's processed and several people have worked on it for several months, it's cost a lot of people a lot of money. And also especially in underground music it's even more crucial, because it doesn't sell very much anyway, so if you take away the few sales they do, labels will not bother financing it and then you'll end up, unless you like to listen to shitty rehearsal quality stuff, that yeah don't cost anything, we can also just go and record from now on stuff at rehearsals and just put it free on the internet, but is that what you really want to hear? Because if you want to hear a proper,

properly recorded, balanced album, then you have to admit that it costs, it's going to cost money, it's not going to come for free. And unless you expect me to pay for it as well, other than the effort of doing the recording and everything, then I hope you appreciate my effort and buy a CD, or at least a t-shirt or something, and support the band really, so that I can continue doing this in the future as much as anything else, not you know, to make a lot of money and go to Hawaii or something.

It's more about even continuing to do what you're doing, that's more what it's about in the underground scene really. You need to prove to yourself and to your label that you're a self-sustaining band, nobody wants to lose money, labels don't want to lose money, and the band doesn't want to lose money. You should at least get back what you have invested into an album I think.

S: Yeah definitely...okay, thanks man. Going back to influences, can you say what some of your biggest influences have been, both now and over the history of Pantheist, and I'm not just talking about music now, but about general things really, you know, everything from art to philosophy, to...

K: Ah well, if I was in Norway I would say, ohh the tree, and the sun, and the moon, and the fjords and blah blah blah...

S: [laughs] Well you can't say that in Britain...

K: I can't really say that, I come from Greece anyway...

S: Yeah... [laughs]

K: But um, yeah influences are just, for me it's very personal, and the music of Pantheist, and I said it before, is a very personal thing. It's not about Lovecraft or, you know, it's not even about nature actually so much, you know look how beautiful the fjords are or whatever. It's about really, feelings that we have and you want to express. So influences can be daily life, the things you've seen, something you've read about, something you've experienced yourself, a certain feeling you want to capture, a certain emotion, a certain situation or person you know who behaves in a certain way and you're fascinated by it and you want to capture it. It's about all this stuff really, so the influences are, as often not musical as they are musical I think. Musical, again is never going to be like, oh I like band X let's try to sound like band X. It's usually more, different influences from different styles of music, that come into your mind, that in your mind, at least express that certain feeling that you want to express. And you try to bring them together in a way that they are, as specific as possible, or expressing that particular feeling that you want to express.

S: Yeah...and talking about the song writing process and everything, obviously Pantheist's compositions, and the band's song writing style in general, are very unique I guess, compared to a lot of similar music, if there is any similar music [chuckles]...

K: I'm glad you find that! [chuckles]

S: *As the main song writer over the years, can you describe how you actually come up with Pantheist music? I know that you have a classical background for example.*

K: Yeah...um, well...because it could be so many different ways, you know, there's no one way to...it's, very often it's just, a matter of hearing music like someone hears voices almost. It's like hearing a certain melody, and then you know, you start developing it in your head. So it's almost like I hear the song in my head. Very often the song-I mean to be honest, most of the songs that I've composed have been, before I've even played a note on the piano, I've developed the whole song in my head. Because of the certain melodies that I'm hearing, and then I'm hearing different sections, and then I'm trying to bring the different sections together. Of course once you start playing it then you've got this physical element of playing, that makes you start thinking of other ideas around it.

Yeah that classical background has helped also, because my compositions start usually on the piano, I just sit there and play the piano riff. And again it's about if you can play something simply on the piano, then you know that it's good. I like strong melodies, and I think in a lot of the albums we have, I'd like to think that we have quite, distinctive melodies. Because for me music is about that strong tune that you sing and it's, it's very conservative, but that's exactly what I think of music. It's not about soundscapes, or just like they do in post-rock or drone or whatever, it's really about a beautiful melody and you work around that really. Or a tune, or a riff, something that sounds really powerful, something like that. But for me it's really just sitting on the piano, just playing that melody, and just hearing that arrangement while I'm playing the piano. Like I'm hearing the whole orchestra behind it while I'm just playing something simple on the piano. Probably like some sort of village idiot, who just sits there with a one stringed guitar, and everyone thinks what the, what is this idiot doing. And probably the idiot is using his head, and in there there's a whole concerto or something. But I think that's how it is, it's a very personal thing, and it develops from the very simple means, but then it goes out of hand and becomes a song. And everyone gets involved, and they add their own stuff to it.

S: *And what about you as a musician, because of course you contribute in a number of other ways, I mean you do vocals, keyboards, and you also write the lyrics...do you enjoy all these parts of the process equally? I mean I think for example your voice, as you mentioned earlier, its developed a lot over the years and I think perhaps on the latest album it's your best vocal performance to date. And I guess the album's notable as well because of its lack of growls, which may be controversial again...[both laugh] I mean what do you think of all this yourself as a musician?*

K: Yeah I mean, well I always enjoyed playing the keyboards. Singing, was not always, I didn't always enjoy it as much, because I was, I never thought of myself, in the beginning at least, as a great singer. But I got more confident with the last album, and I think it shows.

Yeah, lyrics are very important. A lot of bands, in metal especially, write, sort of, it's really about the music and the lyrics are not, not important. But for me music is about telling a story, and the story needs music and lyrics, both of them. So yeah, I enjoy all of these things, and the way they all come in together really. But sometimes, once things are realised, they don't sound as they sounded in their head. And that's also another thing that you have to take into consideration, the limitations you have, technical limitations, and other limitations you have. So you might hear a very flashy guitar solo in your head, but then you have to realise that you play in Pantheist, and the guitarist in question that you have might not be able, or even interested to play flashy guitar solos. You just, really have to always work with the limitations of reality really. You might have something in your head that sounds like a whole classical orchestra playing, but then-which I had with the earlier albums, but then, you don't have a classical orchestra there, so it might sound a bit goofy if you're not careful.

So you just have to be very careful with how you orchestrate the whole thing, so you don't sound like a total idiot. And that's why also nowadays I kind of also developed away from the idea of trying to simulate orchestras of other real instruments you know. Either use these instruments, the real instruments, or use just, I don't know, make up instruments that are different, instruments that people don't expect. With the last album, I think we did just that, like in the previous album 'Journey' we more experimented with sounds, trying to introduce as many sounds as possible, but now with this one we crystallised certain sounds we want to be using. We used real piano, because I think it's very important that the piano sounds real. We used proper mellotron type string arrangements, thanks to Greg [the producer], that were sort of transcribed, proper mellotron samples. We used kind of analogue type of keyboards, and sounds also, some sounds that went through certain modules to change the frequencies etcetera. So it was just really trying to create sounds that don't try to sound like an existing instrument, almost like they're something in their own right, I think that's important.

And with singing it's the same thing. I mean you can, and I know, okay I know Greg is quite guilty of using the auto-tuning quite a lot on the voice, because he wants everything to sound perfect, but sometimes I had to tell him no, don't use it here. And then he'd say yeah but it doesn't sound perfect, and I'd say yeah that's good, that's what I want. It doesn't have to sound perfect, because that's not you is it, you still have to go out there on the stage and sing it, and if it sounds perfect on the record, and then live you cannot recreate that perfection, then of course you will fail, and you know, I don't want to fail. [chuckles] So yes, coming back to that imperfection in music is important, I don't like perfection.

S: *So do you-would you say you're enjoying the singing more now?*

K: Yeah much more, definitely. I mean I took singing lessons and I learned to appreciate that, I think in the earlier albums and definitely in 'Journey', it was all about oh, let's keep the tone. And I think a lot of singers do that, make that mistake, that they concentrate too much on singing in the right tone. Which of course is important, if you sing out of tune, if you're tone deaf you cannot even be a singer, let's face it. And if you don't get the right tone then it sounds stupid. But, you cannot concentrate on that, you have to concentrate on, what is

the song, what is the emotion you want to convey. And the voice, should like-you can sing in different ways, the same thing in different ways. The voice has a certain tone, and you basically use different combinations of tones, to add...it's just something my vocal coach is always saying, that always stayed with me, is that the difference between an okay singer, and a great singer, is just in the details. It's not something great or big, it's little things that these great singers do, that lifts them above the average. And that's what we have to keep in mind with singing, it's just like with everything else really to be honest. You cannot expect to reinvent the wheel nowadays, to come up with a total overhaul of music or whatever, but what you can do is have that little detail that makes you better than most other people, who don't have that detail. So you know, that's what you aspire to do.

S: Yeah...and um, again, how would you say that Pantheist manages to kind of, recreate this originality which I think does exist on each record, whilst retaining this kind of familiar Pantheist atmosphere and sound, which I think is ever present.

K: Well in the beginning I think we were trying, well I was trying, to recreate it, but now I'm not trying anymore. Because you realise after a while, in the beginning it was one of my big fears. Because I do different things every time, it's like I'll go away, and you're a bit carried away by the reactions you read, maybe about ohh you've moved too far away from the true funeral doom sound blah blah blah. But the reality is it's not. We never tried to sound like that, I don't even know what the true funeral doom sound is, and I'm not interested to be perfectly frank, I'm only interested in the true Pantheist sound and only we in the band know what that is.

It's just, it's not so much about trying to keep the existing spirit, because it is there anyway. It's hard to explain, but after a while you become more relaxed about, you know, "oh no I want you still to sound like Pantheist"...I know what is Pantheist. And I have certain compositions in my mind and I know that if I was to use them we wouldn't sound like Pantheist anymore, therefore I'm not using them, even though I might think they're really good. So they become Ereipia, Wijlen Wij, Crippled Black Phoenix, anything I've played in, some of these ideas are getting in there really. But in Pantheist it's all about, you know, I've said it several times in this interview, and that's just because it's true...it's all about the individuality of the emotion, as long as what we do is individual, as long as we don't get sidetracked. Like oh let's do now Lovecraft, or let's do something about the woods of Norway or whatever, and it's still about personal impressions, experiences, etcetera that we have, then that's the true Pantheist sound, and that's what it's about really, that's all you need really.

S: Yeah. And I think, I mean, Pantheist are undoubtedly popular band within the underground, and there will be a lot of people, including myself, who will not just enjoy the music, but will have, will be touched by it in some way, and affected by it. I mean how does this make you feel as a musician, and a song writer?

K: Well it's great. I mean that's exactly what I was saying about earlier, when I said that it's about the connection with the audience, you know, why do you...it's a social process, making music, why would you make music...I mean, when I got into the funeral doom if you like, scene, or actually the doom metal scene in general, with Doom-metal.com etcetera, there were a lot of people there who just, you know, had very strange ideas about music. Like, oh you know every band who sells more than 500 records is a sell out, and every band that...I mean these are very strange pre-conceived ideas, and somehow it basically came down to that we as artists should be totally oblivious to other people, and should just totally do your own thing and don't care about anything. And I think yeah but you can't really make music like that can you, I mean yes you can do it for yourself. I mean record something and listen to it for you and maybe like, make a few tapes for your friends to listen to or something also, but if you really are serious about what I said, which is communicating something, then you have to include other people in it, you cannot just do it without thinking of other people, or without expecting other people to listen to it and have their own views about it.

I think there's a very protective sort of idea you find very often in black metal and in doom metal, which is about, oh I'm going to make only 50 copies, to make sure that the unworthy ones will not listen to it. But who are the unworthy ones, who are the worthy ones? Well I'll tell you what they are, those that agree with you and will give you cuddles and pat pat pat, yeah yeah yeah that's exactly, the perfect thing, you know, you've made the perfect music etcetera. Because let's face it, the more you open it up to people the more you open it up for criticism also, and that's what a lot of people are afraid of in the underground scene, of criticism.

But I think you just get it out there and if you are serious about what you do, why shouldn't you be proud of what you do, and therefore why shouldn't you want others to listen to what you are doing. Surely that's what it is all about. And I don't necessarily want them to pay me a shitload of money for what I've done, but I want them to listen to it, and identify with it. If I hear that people do that, then I'm thinking yes! I'm connecting with people, and that's very important, that's what it is about really.

S: *Yeah...you'll be pleased to know these are my last few questions by the way....*

K: Oh not at all, it's very interesting so far.

S: *Yeah! And what would you say about your kind of, emotional experience of your music? I mean, obviously Pantheist summons certain types of moods from the listener. How do you find your part in it, obviously as main song writer and musician, I mean is it catatonic, are there partly negative aspects to it, or...?*

K: Um, well, for me, yeah it is a partly cathartic experience of course.

S: *Sorry cathartic, that's what I meant to say yeah, not catatonic! [laughs]*

K: Yes...I understood that haha, I figured that was what you meant...[laughs]

S: Thank you, thank you for that! [laughs]

K: I figured that haha...but um, yeah it is a cathartic experience really. It's about, what I said earlier...it's not, you know, I don't want to make, I don't want to be silly and sort of say, ahh look how I'm slashing my wrists because I'm making this depressing music. Bands like Shining also I think, I don't know how they are now but I remember at the time, that they had all this, cutting up and all that jazz. Well I think they should really consult the psychiatrist, I don't think it's a healthy thing to be honest. Or Funeral, with two suicides in the band, I mean it's very tragic of course. But I'm thinking, that's not what music's about. And you don't need to die to show that you mean something. You can be convincing in different ways. Again it's that subtlety which I think we are missing in the extreme underground scene if you like. Almost like, someone has to throw himself from a bridge for his band to become known, like what happened to Worship. If he had not thrown himself off the bridge would his music been false, would it not have been real?

Yeah it's just, it is catharsis, it's about expressing certain emotions, it's about getting it out of your system. You know, I'm not a negative person, and that's partly because I'm making music. If I didn't make music, then where would all this negative energy go? Certainly in my daily life and interactions. Like all this depression that we're dealing with sometimes in our lyrics and in our music. There are some times, I mean you hear sometimes these silly ideas that doom metal people are just people that like to get depressed by music, they're just missing the point. Most people who listen to doom metal genuinely, they actually, you know, they don't get depressed by the music. What's the point of listening to music if you get depressed by it. You don't want to get depressed by music, it just happens because people are different, and you have to respect that. Certain people get a positive feeling by negative music, it's a perverse effect but it does work with a lot of people. Certainly it works with me.

I listen to a lot of, you know, pessimistic music if you like, but it makes me feel better, because it makes me think oh god, no matter how bad you feel, it could be much worse out there. [chuckles] You know, you get it out of your system, like ahh, this is the worst possible feeling I can imagine, let's listen to, I don't know, some really depressing music and ahh yeah, get it out of your system, I feel it, how negative is. And then it's gone. The CD is over and then you're in the real life and you've experienced that feeling and you don't feel the need any more to experience it. So really, it's that simple for me. It's not like people making themselves depressed. I'm sure there are people making themselves depressed, but I generally get depressed by Britney Spears and that sort of music, because I listen to it and I'm thinking, if someone was to shut me in a room and play the whole day commercial pop music, Lady Gaga, Britney Spears and Madonna or whatever, I'd just commit suicide because I'd find it totally depressing. It's just people are different and they react differently to different things, that's all really.

S: *And why do you think that it is, because I certainly think, I mean take my own taste in music, I think I'm probably quite narrow minded, but I don't just listen to doom metal or anything but certainly that's the common link in all of the music I listen to, I guess there's this common kind of melancholy element to it. I mean why do you think it is that that kind of music is particularly appealing to so many people? Because I don't think it is just within doom metal either is it, I think...*

K: Yeah, other genres...

S: Yeah, rock music, whatever...

K: Yeah absolutely. Yeah there's a lot of people who are into melancholic music, totally. I know, well, Leonard Cohen, writes sort of depressive singer/song writer music for instance. And so many other artists, which are even mainstream, like Portishead, when you think about it is quite a depressive sort of sound. But I know them because I was of course in Geoff's label when I was in Crippled Black Phoenix, and he's not depressed at all, I mean he's someone who likes to enjoy life. And I'm sure the rest in Portishead are the same. It's just, I don't know it's just you know some people have the need to listen to something dark, or depressing, or melancholic, or moody, because it makes them feel better, in the same sense that some people feel better by happy music. I don't like happy music, because for me, I can only speak for me personally, because it's more like something for research to understand what actually makes-yeah, there's a lot of research these days about music and what effects it has on people, but I can only speak for myself and say that, happy music, the reason I don't like most happy music, is because it sounds forced to my ears. It sounds like, let's convince ourselves that everything is great, and that life is a big party etcetera, which it isn't, so I find it very ungenue music usually, happy music. Without saying that I hate all happy music, I like some of it.

In the same sense of course you can get the same stuff with depressing music or melancholic music, with music that says ohh let's try to make, let's try to sound depressing, you know, and that's again, that's false. And that term is used so often, 'true' and 'false'. 'True doom', 'true black metal', 'true funeral doom', true blah blah blah. But for me it's very simple. True is if you do something that you mean, false is something that's forced, or something that doesn't come...I could feel very happy and make a depressed funeral doom album, and then that would be false. I could be very unhappy and make a depressed funeral doom album and that would be true, because that's how I feel at the moment. It's about just being genuine, being honest really, that's what it is all about I think.

S: *Yeah...so maybe it's not so much about just listening to melancholic music, it's more about listening to music where you feel that there's genuine emotion in there.*

K: Yeah, for me totally yes. And for me I just can't help feeling that in a lot of melancholic music there is a lot of genuine emotion because...I mean, I think everyone wants to be happy at the end of the day. And therefore a lot of the music almost like, aspires to recreate that

forced feeling of happiness, because everyone wants to be happy. So it's almost like, c'mon we'll make you dance, we'll make you be happy. And I'm like, uugh...I hate this sort of feeling, this forced sort of, c'mon I'm telling you life is a party sort of thing. But in melancholic music, because people don't like the negative of feeling sad or feeling melancholic or whatever, I think it's more genuine. Because nobody will, as I said earlier, I don't think everyone was depressed themselves by making melancholic music, therefore it must be genuine, because it comes out like that. It means there's a true emotion there that needs to be communicated, and it feels more genuine, more real to me.

S: And how does this, and the music, and your music, kind of relate to your view of the world, and your place in the world, and your experiences of it. I mean for example what effects do your experiences have on your music? And I'm not just talking about personal experiences, but world views, whatever.

K: Well, obviously as you know the name of the band is actually a world view, Pantheist. It's about just looking at the world in a certain way. And yeah, it's something that I'm sympathetic to, which is looking at everything in terms of, almost like as a big whole really, a big organic sort of, whole. And that's the music, or I'd like to think the music of Pantheist is quite organic also, that's what it was all about. It was about making sure that, you know, what we do is never too geometric, too perfect, again that word that I hate, I don't like in music perfection. It's more about a certain sort of-it's about being genuine again, about being...because for me the world is not perfect, I look around it and it looks like a big mass of things that are influencing each other, but I don't see any perfection, any geometric perfection in anything. And I wanted to capture that in music also, and that's why Pantheist.

And for the rest, yeah every influence, everything you experience, I think from the moment you open your eyes in this world, to the moment you die, everything can be used in music. There's nothing, you cannot shut out anything really. Just, from the moment you live, you can make music, it's an experience really I think. You can feel the need to express yourself from music, or in different ways, but everyone feels the need to express themselves. For me it's music, therefore, anything experienced can become music, ultimately.

S: Okay, thank you. And finally, how do you see the future of Pantheist?

K: Ah well, that's a very good question. Well, I hope that we can do some more gigs. So far we don't have that much scheduled, only that one in Holland. We're trying to set up a few at the moment, a few more. And just get out there, that's in the short term obviously. Yeah, promote the album really, and just hope we can continue, so far the response has been very good, what I've got from the first reviews and the first interviews etcetera. So it's about hopefully trying to continue working with that momentum. And then at some point next year, start thinking about recording another album maybe. Which hopefully we will continue with the idea that we have been developing with the new line-up now. At the moment I'm thinking in terms of this album, that needs to be promoted, so the work is only just beginning. And then another album will need to be done, and then after that, it's almost like, a black sort of, a

big black thing there, I'm not sure what's going to happen after that, so we're going to have to see really.

S: I mean do you have certain, certain things you'd like to achieve perhaps? Or like, goals, or aspirations maybe?

K: I want to make an album, that I'm-well, I could never be able to be perfectly happy with any album, but an album that I feel; "that's it", it captures what I wanted to say in this band really. But unfortunately if you come to that point, then you also have to break up as a band, because of course, how far can you go from there. You have created the ultimate album if you like in the band, what you really wanted to capture, and that's it really, what's the point of still continuing it after that.

So I want to get there, but at the same time I don't really want to get there, because it will mean the end of the band probably. I mean what's the point in continuing if you don't feel you have anymore to say? It's all about, you know, communicating something with the band, and if you don't have anything more to communicate, or if you cannot convince yourself that you can do something that is better than a particular album you have done in the past, then, unless you make a lot of money and you just continue to generate, and work on the strength of the sales or something, then why else would you do it? You'd just, you'd feel well, that's it, I've said what I had to say, let's move on, and maybe just, under a different name do something different. So yeah...but you know, we're not there yet, we'll see.

Conducted on Saturday 26th March 2011, two weeks before the release of 'Pantheist'.